

PRATHAM BOOKS
A Book in Every Child's Hand

Level 4

A Walk Among Trees

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The royal orchard looked lush after the rains. The earth was soft and wet and had a delightful fragrance. The trees looked like they had been washed and each leaf looked like it had been polished by hand.

The head gardener was getting a new tree planted. He directed his helpers to a pit that had been prepared just that morning. The young tree was carefully lowered. All along, the head gardener kept saying, “I will lose my job and all of you will rot in the darkest chambers of the palace if this tree does not survive. And if it blooms, you won’t have to work another day in your life. You will all be handsomely rewarded.”

As an offering to Mother Earth, he threw in sugar cane juice, before the roots of the young tree were patted with mud. Just then the King and his young prince stepped into the orchard.

This was to be the first walk among the trees for the prince with his father. “Father, what is this sapling?” asked the prince, pointing to a plant. “It is a pomegranate sapling. The tree that will have the most beautiful flowers...”

The prince watched his father admiring the trees around them with love and care.



Pomegranate

It is hard to say which is more beautiful - a pomegranate fruit or the brilliant red flower. The fruit has a deep red colour and is the size of a cricket ball.

It has leathery skin and when it is opened, you find many red, juicy seeds, which look as though they are made of glass. Each seed has a woody, crunchy centre. Some fruits are yellowish pink and have pink seeds. These are also very tasty.

The pomegranate tree grows to about three metres. The long and narrow leaves are shiny and the branches have a few thorns. In the spring, the tree is covered with scarlet flowers. The petals look as though they are made of crinkly paper.

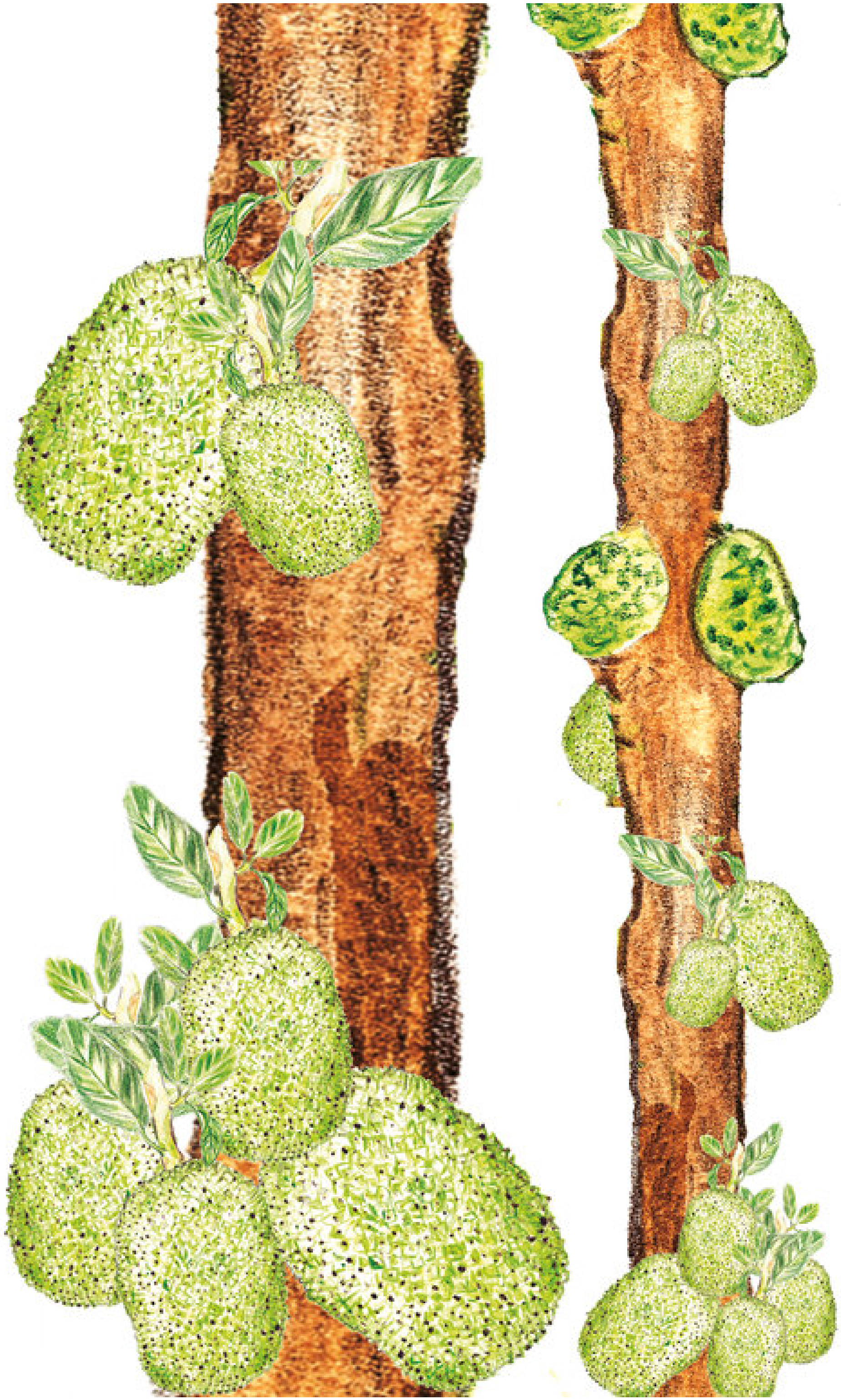
These flowers have no smell. The petals grow out of a red part called the calyx. After the petals fall, the calyx begins to grow bigger and bigger till it becomes a pomegranate with a crown.



Pomegranate juice is very tasty and is taken to bring down fever. Pomegranates contain plenty of natural sugars and vitamin C. The dried seeds are made into sour *anardana*, which is a spice used to flavour pakoras and aloo paranthas. The rind of the pomegranate is dried and powdered and taken to cure an upset stomach.

Pomegranates are called *anar* in Hindi. One of the most renowned dancers in the court of Mughal emperor Akbar was called *Anarkali* — bud of the *anar* — because she was so beautiful.

Some pomegranates are called *kandhari*, as once they were only grown in a place called Kandahar, in Afghanistan.

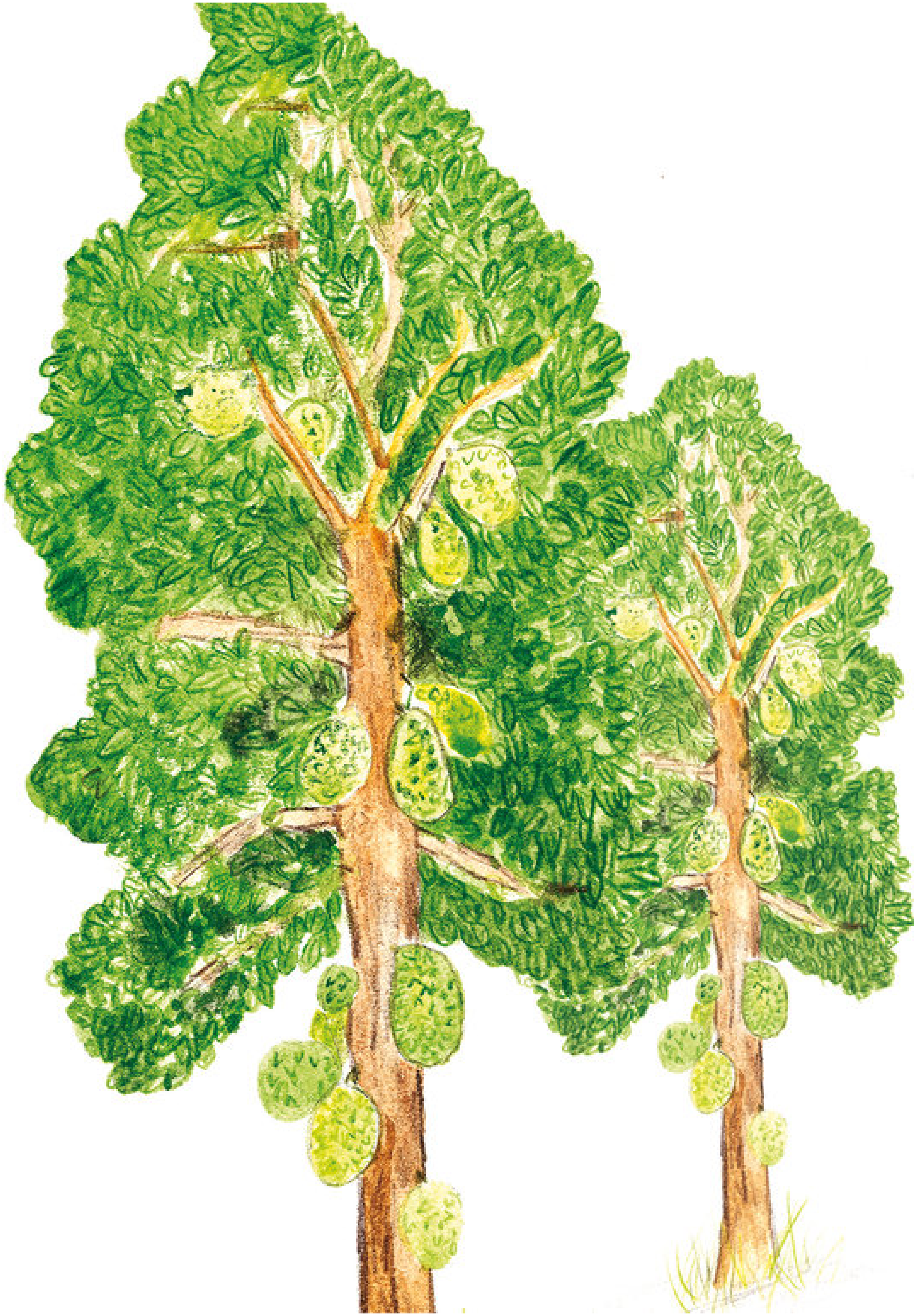


Jackfruit

The jackfruit grows on a tall tree with a thick foliage of dark green leaves. The jackfruit does not grow just on the branches like other fruit, but also on the tree trunk.

Another amazing fact is that when the jackfruit tree turns very old, the fruit can also grow on those roots which come out above the ground.

The large, oblong fruits can sometimes weigh as much as 40 kilograms. Their rough skins are covered with conical studs. When jackfruits are young they are green and eaten as a vegetable, but when they are ripe and turn yellowish-brown they are eaten as a fruit. The ripe fruit has a strong characteristic smell and not everyone likes it.



The seeds of the jackfruit are also very tasty. They can be roasted and eaten. Fried jackfruit makes delicious chips. When sugared and dried, the fruits make excellent candy. The leaves are warmed and used to foment wounds and stop swellings.

The wood of this tree is not attacked by termites. An orange dye is made by boiling the wood. This is used to colour the robes of Buddhist monks. When two sticks of the jackfruit tree are rubbed together, fire can be produced.

The tree is very ancient and it is mentioned in Sanskrit texts as the *panas*. It is the largest tree-borne fruit in the world. This tree has its origin in India. The fruit is very nutritious, as it has carbohydrates, proteins, some fats and vitamins.



Papaya

When we cut open a golden orange papaya, we find a lot of shiny, black seeds that look like whole black pepper. Can you imagine how many trees can grow from each fruit — at least 500! But not all the trees that grow from the seeds will give us fruit. This is because some trees have flowers that are male and other trees have flowers that are female.

When we plant many papaya trees together, it ensures that cross-pollination takes place and the ‘female’ trees bear fruit. The fragrance of papaya flowers is very sweet. Insects and birds help in pollination and little papaya fruits begin to form.



The tree has big leaves that are thickly veined. When they dry, they fall off leaving a scar on the trunk. The wood of the trunk is not hard. It is soft inside, rather like the stem of a big plant.

Papayas are very nutritious, with lots of vitamin C and A, and calcium too. Raw papayas are used as a tasty vegetable. Papayas have an enzyme called papain, which is useful for digestion. Raw papaya helps in tenderizing meat.

Ripe papaya pulp is good for skin problems and is used to get rid of spots and blemishes on the skin. Papayas came from Mexico and Central America. But they are seen almost everywhere in India!



Banana

Some banana trees are as tall as a single-storeyed house while others are only as tall as a person. The leaves are sometimes one-and-a-half metres long and over half a metre broad, with a thick rib running through the centre.

The new leaves have a fresh green colour but as they grow older, they become darker and get torn at the edges. The trunk of the banana has no bark. It is actually a thick stem made of the stems of the leaves that are tightly wound around each other.

The flowers of the banana tree grow inside a reddish cone. Hundreds of tiny white flowers can be found inside each cone. As many as a hundred bananas can grow together in a bunch. When the bananas are almost ripe, the bunch is cut down and left to ripen.



Raw bananas are eaten as a vegetable. Delicious chips can be made from raw bananas. Banana flowers are used to make tasty curries. Monkeys and elephants love bananas. An elephant can eat many bunches by himself!

Bananas are nutritious as they have many vitamins such as A, B and C, as well as calcium, which is needed for our bones to grow strong.

It is also a good source of minerals like potassium and magnesium. Bananas are considered auspicious by Hindus and are offered during a puja. When there is a wedding or a puja, the trees or bunches of bananas are used to decorate both sides of the entrance to the house. The leaves make wonderful, natural plates. The leaves are also used to make cups.



Jamun

The jamun tree is tall and graceful, with a grey-brown bark and deep green, long oval pointed leaves. The trees always have dense foliage. They grow about 12 metres tall. Children love to play beneath their deep shade. The bark is smooth but the wood is weak so the trees are not very safe to climb.

From March to May, the tree is full of bunches of tiny creamy flowers, which bees and other insects love for their nectar. We all wait for the rains, when the jamun gives delicious, deep purple fruit with a stone in the centre. The ripe fruit is sweet-sour and good to eat. Ask any parrot or squirrel, or even fruit bats that come to eat the juicy berries at night!

Jamun trees often grow wild in forests and according to Hindu legend, Krishna loved to eat the fruit when he grazed his cows. The dark purple colour of the fruit is supposed to be the same colour as Krishna's complexion. Lord Ganesh is supposed to love this fruit too. The tree is also sacred to Shiva and Vishnu.



This tree is originally from India. The name jamun, comes from the word *Jambu Dweep*, as India was once known in the olden days, since it was supposed to be full of jamun trees!

Ripe jamuns are very tasty when they are eaten with rock salt.

In the forests when wild jamuns fall from the tree they are eaten by bears, deer, monkeys and other small animals.

The bark and seeds of the jamun are dried and powdered and then used as a medicine for diabetes. The fruit is rich in fruit sugar, iron and vitamin C.



Guava

Guavas are really delicious! Ripe yellow ones are tasty, but the crunchy green ones are mouth-watering too, especially when sprinkled with salt and masala.

Have you seen a guava tree? It is not very tall, possibly as tall as a single storeyed house. The trunk is slender with a grey-ochre bark that peels off in strips. The leaves are oval and rough to touch. The tree is full of beautiful, five-petalled white flowers, towards the end of winter and then again at the time of the rains.

When these flowers fall, small green guavas begin to appear. At first, the fruit is green and hard. As it ripens, it becomes softer and the colour becomes a creamy gold.

The flesh is white and in the centre, there are lots of woody seeds. Some guavas have pink flesh. These are also very tasty. Another type of guava is deep red on the outside.



Guavas that ripen in the winter are always tastier than those found during the rest of the year. In India, Allahabadi guavas are famous for their taste.

There are so many guava trees in India that it is hard to believe that they came from Brazil in South America. Sailors travelling from those parts, brought the seeds of guavas with them.

Parrots and monkeys love guavas. It is believed that a guava pecked by a parrot will be sweet!
Guavas are very good for us as they are full of vitamin A and C. The tree has other uses too. The leaves are mashed and used to relieve toothache. The bark is used to make a dye for colouring silk.

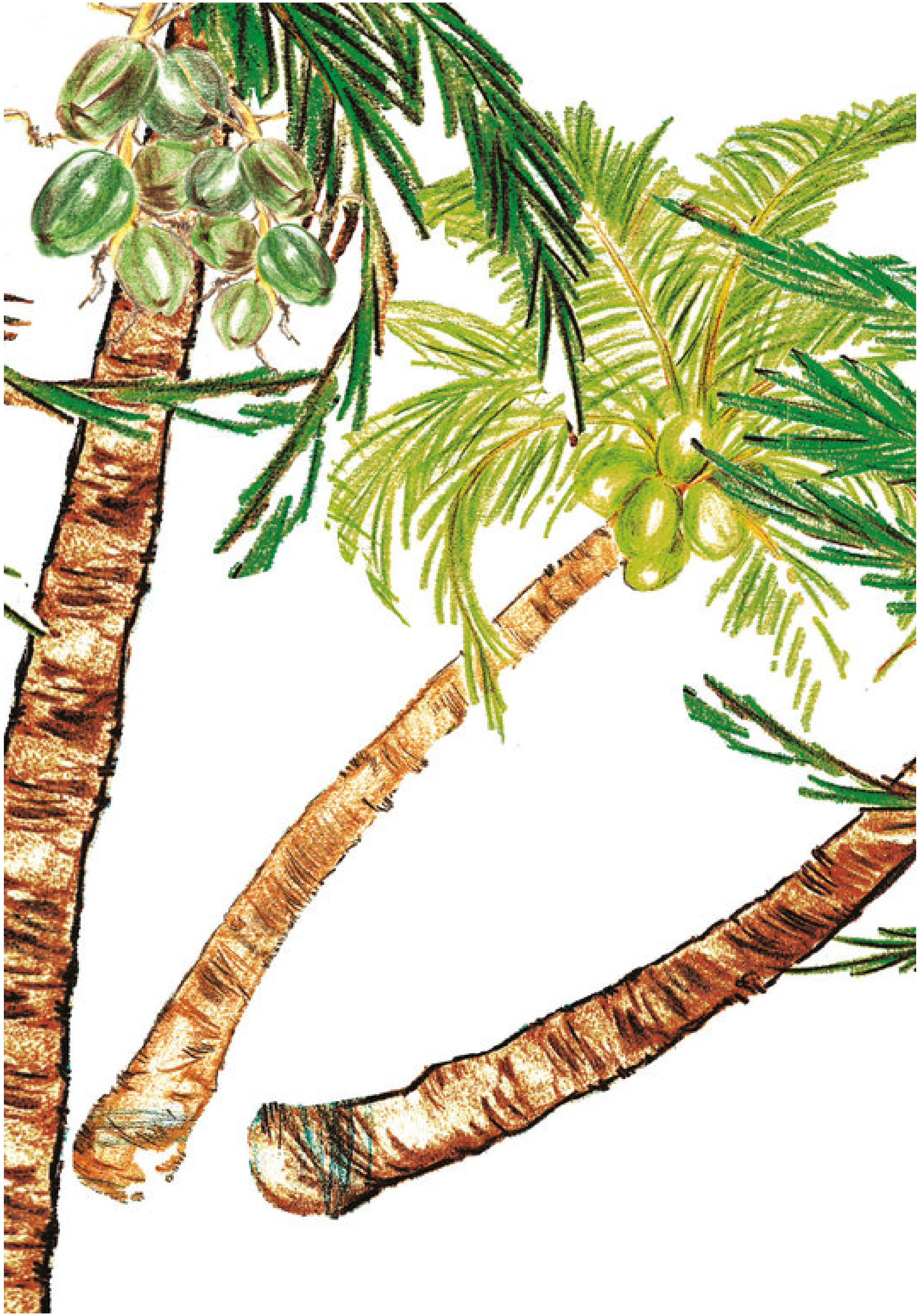


Coconut

Graceful coconut trees grow in sandy soil, in the tropics where the weather is warm and wet. Coastal areas have the largest number of coconut trees. This tall tree has a slim trunk, which bends with the strong breeze that blows in coastal areas. Because it bends, it does not break.

The water inside green coconuts is very tasty and nutritious. It has sugar, protein, amino acids, and minerals like calcium, iron and copper, and vitamins. As the fruit becomes ripe, it turns brown and hard and the water inside becomes sweeter, until it is quite dry. Coconut oil is extracted from the flesh when the nut turns brown and woody.

Each coconut leaf has a long central rib with smaller hard leaves growing on either side. Waving in the breeze, coconut leaves resemble the feathers of some giant bird. The leaves are plaited to make baskets and mats, and also to make thatched roofs. The hollowed out trunk is used as boats.



It is amazing that even the husk, that encloses the shell of the coconut, is used for making ropes, mats, brushes and to stuff mattresses.

All over the world, the coconut tree is prized for its different uses. Sometimes it is known as the tree of heaven. It is supposed to have come from the Melanesian islands in the Pacific Ocean.

If you had no other tree but the coconut, you could build a house, have a meal and a cool drink, make clothes from leaves, make a broom and even have a soft mattress to sleep on! Can you think of any other uses?

The coconut is a symbol of prosperity.

“Father, why are these trees so special to you?” asked the prince. “Son, these trees grow in different parts of India and during my travels to different states, I have chosen the most delicious fruit trees of those regions. They all need different kinds of climate to survive. But, here, our soil is so rich and our gardeners so dedicated, that they have been able to raise all these trees. Look at this one. It is a ber tree.”





Ber

Sometimes on the way to school or walking around the edges of fields, we come across ber bushes. They are thorny, but the little red fruit with a stone in the centre is worth plucking because it is very tasty.

There are many different types of bers, some grow on trees with graceful, drooping branches whereas others grow on bushes. Some are round and others have a longish shape, but they all have a wonderful flavour. Ber trees can be about six metres tall and the bushes are only about one metre high. The ber tree and the ber bush are both thorny. The trees have longer thorns and that is why when bers are ripe, people take a long stick with a sharp knife at the end of it, to cut down ripe bers. Sometimes, if the branch is shaken hard, the ripe fruit drops down and can be collected. Ber trees grow in dry places where it does not rain too much. The leaves are eaten by goats, camels and cattle.

Silkworms also eat the leaves of the ber. Another very interesting insect called the lac insect lives on the branches of the ber. The insect sucks the juice and secretes a red substance called lac, from which paints, varnishes and dyes are made.



Orange

We all wait for juicy oranges in the beginning of winter. The tangy smell of a peeled orange is unmistakable. It comes from the oil in the rind.
The orange is easy to eat because it can be peeled and each section eaten separately. It is also a great thirst quencher on a hot day.

Oranges are full of vitamin C, which keeps colds and coughs away. They also have calcium which is good for strong bones. Orange juice is a popular drink and the flavour of oranges is used in many food products.

The best oranges in India come from Nagpur. The trees are about six metres tall, and somewhat thorny.



The leaves are dark green and glossy. If you crush a leaf between your fingers, it has a strong tangy smell. If you sit near flowering orange trees, the perfume is very soothing. That is why the flowers are dried and then stuffed into pillows for a good beauty sleep.

The rind of the orange is dried and mixed with gram flour to make a scrub for the skin. This can be used instead of soap. In the olden days, ladies in China carried oranges in their hands to keep them smelling sweet.

It is thought that the orange tree came from the southern parts of China. Some people think that its origin lies in the foothills of the Himalayas.



Chikoo

When round, brown chikoos grow on trees, they remind us of soft, brown balls. The skin is a bit fuzzy, and the brownish flesh within is very sweet and has a grainy texture. The chikoo has shiny, long, black seeds inside. The leaves of the tree are longish and glossy. The tree can reach a height of about 10 metres.

This tree was brought from South America many years ago where the Aztec Indians called the tree *Chicle*. They tapped the bark for the rubbery gum that oozes out of it and made an ancient chewing gum from it. This is how the idea of making chewing gum came to people's minds in modern times. The word chikoo comes from *chicle*.
Chikoos grow best in warm and humid places. The best chikoos come from Maharashtra and central India. In some parts of the world, the chikoo is known as the Sapodilla.

This fruit has a very high sugar content. It also has a good amount of vitamin C. In some places, the seeds are made into a paste to cure insect bites and stings. Chikoo ice cream is delicious. Have you tried it?



Tamarind

The tamarind tree grows to a height of over 20 metres. It has a long straight trunk with dark brown bark. The branches are strong and supple and droop downwards. The tiny leaves are of a fresh green colour and form graceful, feathery foliage. They are also sour like the tamarind and are nice to eat.

The tamarind has beautiful yellow flowers with thin streaks of red. When the flower dries up, its place is taken by a tamarind pod. The pod is green and gradually turns a light brown as it ripens. It is like suede to touch.

When it ripens in winter, it becomes a deep brown and the pulp inside is sour with a hint of sweetness. Tamarind seeds are dark brown and enclosed inside the pulp. Squirrels and birds love to eat ripe tamarind. Children also love raw tamarind dipped in rock salt, though it can give them a sore throat sometimes.

Tamarind is used to make delicious curries, pickles, chutneys and tangy *jal jeera*, which is not only cooling in Summer, but also delicious with *gol gappas*.



Tamarind is very rich in iron and vitamin C. The seeds are dried and powdered and can be used as a flour. Tender tamarind leaves and tamarind flowers are also used in cooking.

The tree gives very dense shade in summer. There are many superstitions in India about the tamarind tree. People believe that ghosts live on its branches and that one must not sleep under it at night.

If you look closely at the leaves of a tamarind tree at night, you will notice that they fold up. Of course, the truth is that, because the big tree breathes out carbon dioxide, it is not healthy to sleep under it at night. It is thought that many, many years ago, the tree was brought from Africa. It began to grow very well in this country and now it is very hard to believe that it came from another country.

“Father, what will this new tree grow up to be?” asked the prince excitedly. The King looked at the young tree and then at his son. “Just as you will be king some day, this young tree will grow to bear the king of fruits — the mango! Wait for some time and you will get to taste a fruit like none other.”





Mango

Who doesn't love delicious mangoes! They are equally tasty, whether they are ripe and golden or green and sour when they are raw and eaten with a bit of salt. We all wait eagerly for the summer season when the mango fruit ripens. It has been rightly called the king of fruits
in India.

There are many types of mangoes. Some are big and yellow and can weigh almost a kilogram; others are tiny, green and juicy and have to be sucked to be really enjoyed.

You can throw a whole lot of mangoes in a bucket of ice water and when they are cool, sit under a tree and enjoy them. It is a good practice to wear old clothes and eat mangoes because their juice can ruin clothes.

In India, we have more than a thousand different varieties of mangoes. Wild mango trees originally grew in the Himalayan foothills and spread from there to the rest of the world. The mango tree is about 15 metres tall. Old trees can sometimes grow up to 30 metres. Some mango trees in orchards are just about three metres tall.



The trunk is a dark brown and the long leaves are pointed at the tips. The crushed leaves have a sharp scent. The mango flowers at the end of the cold weather. The bunches of the little pale yellow flowers have a sweet smell. Honey bees gather nectar from them.

Mango leaves are strung on a thread and hung over a doorway, when there is a wedding or any other ceremonial celebration in Hindu households. The motif of a mango can also be found in Indian textiles, saris and various Indian handicrafts. Mango leaves, seeds and flowers are all used for medicine. Mango has lots of vitamin C, which helps us to fight off colds, coughs and gives us healthy gums. Vitamins A and B are also found in this fruit.

After admiring the trees for a while the King and his son headed back to the palace. The prince turned back. He smiled and thought to himself, 'Yes, I like our orchard and all its trees, just like father. I will soon grow to be a king and you will too,' and waved to the young swaying mango tree.



Green Gyan

Trees are the tallest of all plants in the world and they were present on the earth much before human beings appeared.

Trees grow on mountains, along seashores and in hot deserts. We find them growing along the edges of roads, in fields and in our homes and gardens. All plants and trees are necessary for life on earth as they provide oxygen that living beings need to survive.

Most plants have a green colouring matter in their leaves called chlorophyll. During the day, when sunlight falls on the leaves, the leaves prepare food for the plants by a process called photosynthesis. They do this with the help of the water absorbed by the roots, the carbon dioxide from the air that enters the leaves through tiny pores on the surface of the leaf, and sunlight. Oxygen is let out into the air as a result of photosynthesis.



There are thousands of different types of trees but the ones that give us delicious fruit are the best of them all. All trees bear fruit. However, all fruits are not edible. Some may even be poisonous!

But trees are our special friends. They give us shade on a hot day; they provide us with food, timber and medicines. When trees grow over a large area, they form forests. Forests affect the climate of a place, prevent soil erosion and provide a habitat for a variety of animals.

We must look after trees and plant trees if we can, so that we have a healthy environment.

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A Walk Among Trees
(English)

Trees have been growing on our planet well before human beings appeared on it. Without their comforting shade and tasty fruit, our earth would be quite a barren place. Take a walk among trees in the King's orchard to savour the taste, the smell and the legends associated with bountiful fruit trees in India. You will feel refreshed by all that you learn!

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.